Transcript of "Violeta Yas, Meteorologist for NBC New York at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City."

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

12 July 2022

Kelly Savoie:

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners. This is Kelly Savoie, and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 60 episodes and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening and I hope you enjoy this new episode.

Kelly Savoie:

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie and I'm here with Rex Horner and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Rex Horner:

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Violeta Yas, a meteorologist for NBC New York in Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. Welcome, Violeta, thanks very much for joining us today.

Violeta Yas:

Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here. It's great to be joining you guys.

Kelly Savoie:

Violeta, could you tell us a little bit about your educational background and what sparked your interest in science?

Violeta Yas:

Yeah. So, in my case, I always like to say that meteorology found me, my path into science and STEM happened a little backwards. I started the path through journalism actually. I've always been a communicator at heart. I love people. I love communicating. I love getting to know people. That's something that I've always been passionate about and I've always loved to do. So, initially, my first degree was in journalism and media studies and I minored in Spanish, which was actually at the suggestion of my mom and something I'm very grateful for to this day as an immigrant who moved here very young. I was about five years old when we moved to the States. In a lot of cases, it's very easy to lose the language when you're already living outside of a native Spanish-speaking country for so long. So, I'm very grateful to her for that, for suggesting that I pursue some education in Spanish, too, aside from what I was being taught in a household in order to make sure that my writing and reading and comprehension and all of that was on par with the verbal and conversational skills.

Violeta Yas:

So, I started out in journalism and the path to STEM actually was born out of an opportunity I saw to serve underserved communities. When I was on the job hunt, this was back in 2008, and that was during

the last recession. I had a really difficult time finding opportunities, especially as a recent college graduate. It was hard for anyone. It was hard for people with lifelong careers in the field. So, in my case, living in New York at the time and being fresh out of college, it was a very, very steep uphill battle.

Violeta Yas:

So, I saw an opportunity actually at AccuWeather, they were looking for a bilingual weather broadcaster, obviously, up until that point, I did not have the weather background, but up until that point, I had not really considered utilizing my native language, Spanish, as a career tool. So, that sparked my interest right away. Of course, they were willing to train the right person. I decided to step out of my comfort zone, because I really started to think about it in terms of, growing up, I looked at myself as more of a communicator, the arts type of person. I think a lot of young people think that you are either one or the other, that you can only be good at science or math or communication, the arts, and that sort of thing. I was one of those people.

Violeta Yas:

But in retrospect, when I really think about it, I wonder if there was an accessibility issue for me that I just simply was not really exposed to people working in this particular field. It just wasn't something that was talked about even in high school. I don't really remember ever hearing about weather, meteorology, careers in meteorology, and certainly not Black or Brown women being involved in it. So, that's something I still think about to this day. That's what I mean when I say that I feel like my path was born from an opportunity I saw. Because when I came across that job posting and I decided to go for it, in preparing for that role, I started looking for other meteorologists who've been doing this obviously much longer than I, trying to find their work, different words that I could pick up and terminology and just different people that I could emulate and learn from.

Violeta Yas:

I realized that there were very few. There were certain people, bilingual meteorologists, who've been doing it a long time. John Morales in Miami, who's been excellent and a real pioneer in that way and in many ways. But there were very few. So, that was really something that the light bulb went off. And I said, "There's a whole segment of people just like me who are not being exposed to this, not only in the professional sense in terms of being aware of the availability of these kinds of careers, but also even on a day-to-day basis, getting weather information and having that critical information presented to them in a way that they understand."

Violeta Yas:

So, it really took off from there. I was very fortunate at AccuWeather to get a lot of training before I ever went on air. We would do a lot of seminars, hurricane experts, severe weather experts. So, I felt very prepared with that, I guess, informal knowledge, we'll call it, or informal education. Then, eventually, I was presented with the opportunity to go back to school for meteorology. At that point, I was doing it enough that I said, "You know what? I really like this. I think I'm good at it. And I really see an opportunity to also serve." So, it took off from there.

Rex Horner:

So, it was 10 years after your undergraduate degree that you got your broadcast meteorology and geosciences degree, I believe. And you had a wealth of work experience in between. I wanted to ask you, we talked a little bit about how you didn't have some opportunities presented to you in high

school. You didn't have any meteorologists visit your school. You didn't have any women of color to look up to as role models and inspiration in the field. You said that demographic was sparse. But you did find this opportunity and you began to... It sounds like you were seeking out mentors who did help you in your path and you were able then to even take the opportunity of letting STEM find you to make the job that would help you out and would help these underserved communities find a representative in the field.

Rex Horner:

So, I'd originally wanted to ask you what other opportunities you pursued that were beneficial to securing a job in your profession, which you sort of spoke to. But I am interested in this learning curve about adding STEM after you've already been in a professional role, and then going back to school for it, can you give us a little bit more insight into what that 10-year period was like and how your meteorological knowledge evolved during that time?

Violeta Yas:

Yeah, I think it's extremely beneficial and I do see more universities now offering dual degrees or double majors in journalism and meteorology. I think that is incredible. It wasn't available at my school at the time. But I think it's extremely important. Of course, meteorology is extremely important and the cornerstone of what we do in terms of broadcast meteorology. But the broadcast part of it is also very big. It's also very important. I think that younger people should make sure that they're not neglecting that part of the job, because I have seen it before, people who, I mean, extremely intelligent people, several degrees, every certificate under the sun, but it's really important to be able to communicate that knowledge that you've acquired in a way that's easy for people who don't have that kind of educational background to understand.

Violeta Yas:

That doesn't mean watering it down. That means just tailoring your approach, so more people can understand and use the information that you have acquired through both education and your expertise. Because at least in the broadcast meteorology world, that's why people tune in, they want to know, "What do I need to get through my day? Am I dressed the right way? Do I need to cancel this event? Do I need to move? Do I need to wait a little later?" So, they come to you for that type of guidance. So, I really feel that having explored the journalistic aspect of the job first really set me up well to, once I was able to gain more of the scientific background and more of the scientific understanding, to be able to serve as a communicator of that information.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. From what I know of broadcast meteorologists, there are a lot of them that do meteorology, but they also do reporting, especially when they're starting. So, that's another really great reason to have a background in journalism as well as meteorology. So, you talked about AccuWeather and how that was a great opportunity for you out of school. So, after that, did you start working as a broadcast meteorologist at any local stations? How did you end up at Storm Team 4 in New York?

Violeta Yas:

So, I was at AccuWeather for about three and a half years. Toward the end of my time there, I got a call from news director in Philadelphia and they were launching a new Telemundo affiliate. It was going to be the sister station to WCAU, NBC10 in Philadelphia. They wanted to know if I would be a part of it. I

said, obviously, of course, but the position was contingent upon going back to school, which at that point, again, I had been at AccuWeather long enough and had enough experience to know that this was something that I did want to pursue long term.

Violeta Yas:

So, I moved to Philly in 2014 to launch the station and immediately enrolled in Mississippi State. I started my coursework pretty much right away. So, I did the three-year program while I was working full-time on air, which of course is very challenging, but it's also very beneficial. You can apply some of the things you're learning every day and on the spot pretty much. So, I found that to be very beneficial, of course, in terms of time management and discipline, those things are very important when you're juggling all that stuff. But that's the way that it happened for me. I was in Philadelphia for eight years and I had finished my Mississippi State program in 2017, I believe it was.

Rex Horner:

So, I've heard that at graduate school graduations, the folks that are working full-time sometimes receive the loudest applause when they get their degree, because everyone in the audience recognizes what an achievement it is to pull off that feat of achieving a degree and working full-time and supporting yourself and, as you said, managing your time. So, congratulations to you, personally, you surely deserve all the applause that you received getting your degree. So, now, we're at Storm Team 4 in NBC New York. But before that, I want to back up and talk about what it was like starting this NBC affiliate in Philadelphia. Were there any other bilingual weather outlets at the time? What was it like bringing that to the community? What sort of feedback did you receive? How were you able to connect with the community you were hopeful to serve?

Violeta Yas:

Yeah, it's a very special experience that I don't think a lot of people get to be a part of and that's something that I'll always treasure, building something from the ground up. It certainly has its growing pains. You're learning as you go, not only this space, it's a new space, but adding a station to an already very established station and just trying to synchronize all of that and everybody getting readjusted to the workflow. But there was a huge opportunity there, like you said, to serve that particular audience. When I took that job, I was shocked that this was going to be a new station in the city of Philadelphia. I was like, "Well, wait a minute. They don't have at least two." They did have a Univision affiliate there, but outside of that, it was just the one.

Violeta Yas:

So, I was very shocked that there wasn't more of an offering in terms of linear TV and people being able to get that critical, not only weather information, but news information. So, we really saw an opportunity there to expand on what was already being offered and weather played a big role in that. For pretty much my entire time there, I was the only person you could get live weather updates from during severe weather. I think at the other station, the segment was recorded or outsourced through one of their hubs in Miami. That's a big responsibility and I took it very seriously. Of course, that presents challenges, too. Again, I'm in school and I'm doing my best to make sure our community is covered and informed. Sometimes things happen on the weekends. Sometimes things happen in the mornings. Sometimes things happen at night. So, I feel like I really did my best to make sure we were covered in every way possible.

Violeta Yas:

That didn't happen overnight. We certainly expanded little by little. We eventually started doing the school cancellation crawls at the bottom of the screen, which had never been done before in Philadelphia for the Spanish speakers. So, little things like that, that may be on the domestic side of television are taken for granted or they've just been doing it a long time. Things like that, wall-to-wall tornado coverage. I mean, I don't know exactly where you guys are located, but in the Northeast, we've had some very, very rough severe weather seasons in the last couple of years. I handled those all by myself. So, it was a big responsibility and I'm proud of the work that we were able to do as a station and also me, personally. I think keeping in mind that there are people who need this information and really don't have many other places to get it, that makes it very easy to really not take those opportunities of connection with your audience for granted.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. It's hard to believe, in a city that large, Philadelphia, that that would be the case. It's good to know that it's moving in a better direction now.

Rex Horner:

So, Violeta, you recently started at your new position, but one thing we find our listeners always value is an insight into what it's really boots on the ground, so to speak, on the day on the job. And I know that broadcasters keep pretty unusual hours and I'd love to get a window into what it's like for you and how you manage your time. You can blend, if you want, between your current and past job, just to give us an idea of how to make it work as a broadcast meteorologist on air.

Violeta Yas:

Yeah. So, I typically, most days, at the station will start with an editorial meeting. You'll want to let the producers, the crews, the assignment desk, and the managers know what they can expect short term, long term. That serves also as planning help. They need to know if there is something going on or something significant going on with weather, they want to know where they should be sending crews, and how severe it's going to be. So, those decisions all tie in together, we offer a lot of guidance for the core news staff. So, most days we'll start with that.

Violeta Yas:

From there, we tend to dive into the data, get up to speed on what's going on and look everything over for an hour or so. Then from there, you want to start working on the forecast and any adjustments that you want to start making. In this case, I'm going over, let's say, a 9:00 to 6:00 type of schedule. So, once you are caught up and up to speed, you want to start adjusting the forecast and making any necessary changes. Communication is a big part of that. Those transitions between, let's say, the morning shift. So, Maria LaRosa, who does the morning show for us, once she's all done, she'll leave some notes, anything she saw, any trends she's starting to notice with the Model Data and just doing that baton pass is really helpful. Because it gets you quick briefing even within the weather team as to, "Okay, let me keep an eye on that through the course of the afternoon."

Violeta Yas:

So, you work on the forecast, make any adjustments. We also really prioritize updating our digital platforms and making sure that our videos on there are updated. I think, in some cases, maybe the department will cut something from an actual newscast. We really try hard to, and the way we have it

set up, is to do a digital specific forecast. It looks a little more casual visually, the style is a little more casual, and we just feel that it's better, it better serves our audiences, especially any anyone who's tuning in on the website or the app. It's just a little more in line with that.

Violeta Yas:

Then we have a show 11:00 to 12:00, the last 30 minutes is like a lifestyle show, New York Live. So, the main news show is 11:00 to 11:30. Then, from there, there's a little bit of a break. Sometimes, depending on what people have going on, you might have a school visit in the afternoon, depending on staffing and who else is there, maybe you're working on a climate piece. So, maybe that afternoon you might be going out to do some interviews or shoot some video, or simply, still here at the station, coordinating those kind of things and putting a story together or reaching out to people to set up future interviews. Updating social media, of course. Again, updating the digital platforms through the afternoon, that's a continuous thing. That gives us an opportunity, during those times that we're not on air or on traditional television, to stay connected with our viewers and everyone across our personal platforms. Then also, of course, our station platforms, too.

Violeta Yas:

Then it shifts to, "Okay, now, we're getting ready for the afternoon shows," which are longer. So, we have a 4:00, a 5:00, a 6:00, a 7:00 and then an 11:00. So, typically, depending on how many of us are in that day, we'll all pitch in. Some of us will maybe brainstorm new graphics that we can show in the afternoon, to make sure that we're moving the weather story forward and things don't get mundane. So, we'll brainstorm new graphics, try to make some new ones. Also communicating with producers about the other weather information that might be in the newscast. Sometimes, there's weather related stuff. Of course, that isn't necessarily part of our segment. Maybe they're airing some video of some really bad, some very severe storms in the middle of the country. So, just looking over that and making sure everything looks good and then getting everyone ready for the afternoon show.

Violeta Yas:

So, I think the best part of the job is that no two days are the same. You might get a few that are pretty similar. You might get a few, especially if the weather's relatively quiet, you might get a couple of days that are pretty low-key and you get to focus on some other things. But no two days are exactly the same. That's something that I really like about the job, that you really don't know 100 what you can expect that day. Weather is a little more predictable, but news is a different story.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. It sounds very varied. I wanted to ask you, do you ever have the opportunity, if there's a storm coming or there's some type of event, do you ever get to go out and report? I'm always seeing broadcast meteorologists, I'm thinking to myself, "What a trooper. They're out in the snow with their hoods up and the wind is blowing and it's a hurricane." Do you ever get to do that? Or is your job mostly in studio?

Violeta Yas:

In my last job, not too much, maybe once or twice, but mostly we were a much smaller team in Philadelphia, on the Telemundo side, specifically. So, I was needed more in studio. So spent most of my time doing the forecast leg work, the graphics and the more traditional in-studio, on-air work. But we'll see. I'm starting a new role here, so I'm sure at some point I'll be out there. It's nice to, I really enjoy the forecasting aspect of it and presenting the weather in that more traditional way.

Violeta Yas:

But I think getting out, whether it be during storms or just doing different stories, climate stories, and telling sometimes essentially the same, not the same information, but telling a different aspect of the same story, whether it be something on TikTok, you can dive a little further into certain topics on these other platforms. I think that's a really great benefit. So, that's something that I'm looking forward to in this new role, being able to expand on some of the stuff that we talk about and go over in our traditional news shows and being able to take it one step further in a more casual way, depending on the platform.

Rex Horner:

Well, I'm excited to see what you come up with and I will keep track of what interesting side projects you produce. I think that I like, Kelly, I love seeing those videos of people out in the elements, because, for me, I'm a pretty visual learner and I like both abstract and concrete examples. Technically, a chart is abstract to a degree, it's abstracting what we can see with our own senses. So, seeing someone getting whipped by the snow makes you think, "Oh, that's what would happen if I went outside right now." And it really just hits home. The same with live cams, for instance, in a way that even a chart that's saying, "Red is bad." And you are in the red, has a similar effect, but I've always found it to be illuminating to see someone out in the elements. I know it's just a great picture always.

Violeta Yas:

Yeah. I think they really serve, our field crews serve as an additional set of eyes and it helps us for verification purposes. I mean, yes, in a severe situation, you can look at the radar and say, "Okay, I'm pretty sure that's a tornado." Or, "I'm pretty sure it's snowing very heavily right here." But not every situation is like that. And certainly eventually things start to fall a little more in a gray area. So, our field crews are really great with that, in letting us know, "Okay, this is really winding down here. The wind has been coming in from every direction." And it just adds an extra layer of observation and ground truth.

Kelly Savoie:

So, you mentioned that you really enjoy the forecasting aspects. It sounds like the station is very team-oriented. Is there anything else about the job that you really like?

Violeta Yas:

Definitely the fact that it keeps you on your toes and that rarely will two days ever be alike. I think that the ability to connect with people is something that I really enjoy, not only with the people I work with, but also with our viewers. That's something, that's a relationship, us with the viewers, that has evolved so much over time. When I got in the biz, I remember joining Twitter, this would've been in 2010, and nobody was on it. It was like you were talking to yourself, celebrities were on it and some of the news people were... It seriously felt-

Rex Horner:

It's just you and Britney Spears.

Violeta Yas:

... it would be like, "Hello..." Yes, and Rihanna. Rihanna was there. Rihanna was there. So, yeah, it just felt like, "Hello, out there." So, seeing that platform in particular evolve into becoming certainly, especially, I think as it compares to other platforms, like Instagram and Facebook, becoming a place

where a lot of people come for information. People, I think, I would say that, I don't have the data in front of me to back this up or anything, but I think most people, if you're going to follow a news organization, Twitter tends to be the platform where they do it. It's just more succinct, a little more straight to the point. Obviously, the character limit plays a big role in that. But I think seeing that relationship with our viewers evolve over the years and the connection increasing and the immediacy with which you can reach a lot of people.

Violeta Yas:

Obviously, there are some downsides to that, too, constantly being out there and constantly being available and viewers and whoever else, just the public in general, always having a pipeline to use sometimes. The comments aren't always nice. They're not. I think most are. But I think more than anything, it has really been a big positive and has allowed us to build a better connection with the audience. I would say the other thing that I really, really love about this job is being able to use my platform in a positive way and be able to encourage people and having the opportunity to offer the help that, I don't want to say, wasn't offered to me, but I just wasn't able to capitalize on when I was, whether it's high school college or whatever, really trying hard to share the lessons that I learned the hard way, so that other people have that information sooner and can navigate their own paths better.

Rex Horner:

So, I want to ask you about some of the challenges you see yourself or your colleagues or your field facing as a whole. Just as a preview, we will spend some more time getting into the bilingual community and reaching and improving weather communication. So, we will touch on those specifically. But, in general, are there some other areas that you would be able to share, that might be some challenges that your field can conquer in the years ahead?

Violeta Yas:

I think the digital and social media relationship is a very important one, as it pertains to news and weather as well. I think the line between, let's say, journalists, in this case, and influencer is becoming increasingly blurred. I think young people in particular, that's something that they need to keep in mind. I think it's important to utilize these platforms, absolutely, because I wish we had access to these. They existed, when I was in college, but they were really nothing near what they are now. Same thing with Facebook. Facebook was created in my sophomore year in college. I remember being in my dorm room being like, "Hey, what's Facebook?" And signing up.

Violeta Yas:

Rutgers was one of the first schools that was on a platform. Back then, it was only colleges and it was only certain colleges. So, I think having them available helps more than it hurts. And it, for the most part, serves as a really great tool. But like with anything, there can be some pitfalls if you're not careful. So, I think the industry as a whole, I wouldn't say, something that I dealt with personally, I think people need to, I think, consider, "Do I really want to serve as a journalist? Do I really want to serve as a meteorologist? Do I really want to serve this information and help my community be more informed? Or do I enjoy just the TV aspect of it?" That's something that was actually taught to me by my professors. And I'm sure many other people, before getting into the business.

Violeta Yas:

So, it's like, "Listen, this looks really glamorous. I know you probably think you're going to be getting your makeup done and your hair done every day and all these outfits and it's going to be all fun. It's just not like that." So, that's one thing I think of just very broadly that I sometimes see playing out with younger people. I think them thinking about that and considering that from an earlier age is better for everyone. Do I really enjoy the role and being a journalist or being a meteorologist and sharing this information? Or is it more of the television broadcast, camera aspect that I enjoy? For some people, it's both and some people are great at both, but I think, overall, again, very broad, that's something that I see playing out more frequently.

Kelly Savoie:

That makes the job cool. The fact that you can get your makeup and hair done every once in a while and still get to make a difference in your community. Weather's really important, as you were saying before, extreme weather is getting worse and worse. The public really needs to have individuals that are reliable sources of information, because, like you were saying, everybody under the sun is on social media saying they're an expert when they're not.

Violeta Yas:

Right.

Kelly Savoie:

So, it's great to have a job where you can have a little bit of both. Being a bilingual meteorologist and working in it in a variety of markets, what's your advice for improving weather communications for non-English audiences?

Violeta Yas:

So, we have this conversation a lot. I'm really proud of the work we've been able to do with our Committee for Hispanic and Latinx Advancement. Big shout to Joseph Trujillo, he spearheaded that, and he has just been incredible in that way in terms of rallying the troops to address issues that we have all been having for a long time, but just didn't know how to go about it. I didn't know how to take that first step in terms of addressing a lot of those problems. So, big shout out to him. I think it's important to keep in mind and this is certainly something that we do as a committee, doing our best to make sure we are considering everything. Spanish is not a one-size-fits-all language, even across different countries, people speak very differently. Sometimes people have completely different dialects altogether. There are certain words right now, off the top of my head, that I know, if you were to ask people from five or six different countries, how to say popcorn, straw, thunderstorm, you might get five or six different answers.

Violeta Yas:

So, keeping that in mind when we are tackling projects, for example, or deciding what we want to tackle is very important. But I also think, on the other side, it's important to keep in mind that we're not going to please everyone 100%. It's easy to fall into that as well, where we're trying so hard to not, I don't want to say, exclude anyone, but to not leave anything behind in that way. But at the end of the day, we have to make sure that we're compromising and we need to make sure that... The goal is not for everyone to be happy and for them to say, "Oh yeah, this is the word that I would say." The goal is to be able to communicate that information in a more streamlined way, so that the most amount of people understand.

Violeta Yas:

So, something that we might decide in terms of a specific term that we're trying to change the perception around, it might not be how I say that word in Argentina, for example, I was born in Argentina. But if I know that most people would understand that if I said that, then we have to go with this. So, maintaining that balance, I think, has been the key to our committee and a lot of the effort that we've been making in terms of improving communication. So, making sure that we're being inclusive, but also being decisive. And also talking to our community, because in many cases, too, they don't know what they don't know. So, we have been trying to have, for example, in our last National Lightning Safety Week initiative, we did a poll to gauge the level of understanding of certain terms and how certain terms are interpreted.

Violeta Yas:

We got a great response and that was something that didn't necessarily go on for a really long time. But that's really important information. I told you guys, in a city like Philadelphia, we've only had our Telemundo station for eight years now. So, that community is just now realizing, "Oh, there's different ways to say these things. Maybe I'd been misunderstanding when I thought they were saying thunderstorm, and they're saying this." So, even for them, I think it's been a little bit of an awakening in terms of them realizing all of the information that's out there and that there are more trusted weather sources available in Spanish now more than ever.

Rex Horner:

So, you mentioned the AMS Committee for Hispanic and Latinx Advancement, that you're a part of, what else do you do in this role? Or what else does the committee do apart from some of the weather communication aspects that you've mentioned already?

Violeta Yas:

So, the weather communications has been a very large part of it, the committee, this is only our second year, and we really took that first year as an opportunity to sit down and say, "Okay, we're really lacking in a lot of ways. A lot of us have been experiencing these same challenges over however many years." So, we really hit the ground running last year with a lot of different projects. The biggest one was the National Lightning Safety Week. Now what we're looking to do going forward is to just continue to expand on that and take it a step further. Because of COVID, one of the things that we had talked about was taking that particular initiative into schools, since a lot of us do school visits relatively frequently anyway, we thought that would have been a really great opportunity to spread that message, because a lot of parents learn from their kids, too.

Violeta Yas:

They, "Hey, what did you learn today?" "Oh, I learned that, when thunder roars, go indoors." They're able to pass that message along to parents. Again, for Spanish speakers in particular, when they're not exposed to those kinds of sayings and that kind of safety information in the same way that the domestic market is. So, expanding on those projects was something that unfortunately COVID nixed, but we're hoping to maybe pick that up this year, doing some school visits and maybe coming up with some more tangible material with a lot of the graphics that we were able to make as a team and expanding that project, maybe even into employers.

Violeta Yas:

For example, one of the big informational nuggets that came out of that was just the general premise that Latinos in the US tend to be more exposed to lightning due to the places they live and work. Florida and Texas, extremely high Hispanic populations, also, typically, index extremely high, if not first and second, in lightning flash density. Taking it one step further, looking at the industries that Latinos tend to have highest participation in. They tend to be outdoors, agriculture, construction and things like that.

Violeta Yas:

So, taking that project a step further is something that is going to be really important for us going forward and also possibly exploring the opportunity to maybe, like I said, get some employers involved, because sometimes it's not that easy to say to your boss, for example, "Hey, I saw lightning or I heard thunder, I'm going to stop or I'm going to go inside." Not everybody has that level of confidence to have those conversations with bosses, if the policy, any severe policy is not being implemented, obviously, I don't know, but just those situations, not everything happens as we plan it. So, I think maybe trying to reach and partner with some employers or companies I think would be a really great step.

Rex Horner:

Certainly would.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. It sounds like everything you're doing on that committee is wonderful. We truly appreciate everyone who's volunteered to be a part of that. I wanted to go back to you mentioning that you really like helping younger people. I know that you are a part of a media mentoring program at Rutgers. Could you tell us a bit about that and how did you get involved with it?

Violeta Yas:

Absolutely. So, I have always enjoyed mentorship. I do a lot of it, even outside of that committee, just informal. I'm very connected to my alma mater and I'll have some of my former professors sometimes just send me a quick email, "Hey, I have this student, he or she is interested in pursuing," sometimes meteorology sometimes just hard news or digital media, whatever it may be. Sometimes they're bilingual, sometimes they're not. But he'll think that they could maybe benefit from a little guidance. So, he'll connect me with them. Then that relationship develops. But I wanted to also do it in a more official capacity. So, I got involved with the Media Mentoring Program and the way it works is every year I get a new mentee. So, they will pair you with someone who, again, has maybe similar interests, similar career aspirations, and we will connect and you need to meet a certain amount of times a year. Obviously, in person, back then was encouraged. Now, we're slowly opening that back up again. But virtual works, too.

Violeta Yas:

I just help them out. Everyone is different. Every year I meet someone new. As much as I like to think, "Okay, they're my mentee." Truthfully, the mentee relationships, at least in my mind, don't last that long, because I find that these people are very well prepared. They're very smart. They know what they want to do. So, yes, I help them out and answer any questions they may have and even help any placement, if I can help, if they have any interest in internships or what have you, maybe where I'm working. But I find that relationship is very short, because they know what they're doing.

Violeta Yas:

Sometimes you just need someone to bounce ideas off of like, "Hey, or I want to contact this person about this job, is this email professional enough?" Just those little things I think help them tremendously. I find that, for the most part, they don't need me that much. It's just a little bit more of a confidence thing. But it's been great. It's been great for me, too, getting a new mentee every year, because it helps me also stay connected to the next generation of meteorologists and journalists and understand some of the things that they go through, their interests and some of the things that they deal with, what they're interested in, what they're not interested in, and seeing that evolve also year to year is interesting. It's helpful for me to stay connected to them, too.

Rex Horner:

Staying on the topic of student listeners, job seekers, I'd like to ask you what types of positions you see in broadcast meteorology, maybe specifically for bilingual meteorologists and what the future job outlook is and how you have advised some of these mentees that you've worked with directly?

Violeta Yas:

Yeah. I think television has evolved immensely, I've been in the business 12 years, even in those 12 years, I feel it has evolved immensely and it continues to evolve. I think that young professionals are at a great advantage, because of the amount of platforms available to them right now. When I graduated in '08, again, all of these platforms existed, YouTube, Facebook, all that stuff, but they weren't anywhere close to what they are now. So, I started, I remember, I looked for a job for two years, because when I graduated, it was during a recession. So, it was very, very hard. I did my best to just stay busy and keep my skills fresh and try new things and put myself out there and try to find ways to get on camera.

Violeta Yas:

So, I started a blog and I think, now, with as many platforms as they are, and these platforms are now also being taught academically in school, there are courses, digital media courses. It's very valuable to have an understanding of those platforms and use them to your advantage. I think that's something that is a little more unique to young professionals now, and maybe, let's say, the last five or so years, where I think the transition to digital has really, really taken off. So, I think that's important. I think making sure that your platforms are showing what you want to show. If you want to be a broadcast, a general news reporter, then you should be doing your best to cover news. You don't have to always wait for someone to give you that opportunity.

Violeta Yas:

Sometimes you have to make that opportunity for yourself, especially if you're just recently transitioning into the workforce, or maybe you're in a little bit of a transition period. It's important to be a self-starter.

Violeta Yas:

I think that's, especially in this business, because you said earlier, Kelly, everyone now feels like they're an expert. If you give someone a camera, they're an expert. But the reality is that's not the case. So, you want to make sure that you are offering something, offering substance and that you know your material and, at the end of the day, authenticity is I think important now more than ever for that very reason, you can find a million people doing the news or whatever on every platform under the sun. But I have found, at least, that people really gravitate toward authenticity. If you're not a TikTok dancer, then don't

be a TikTok dancer. You don't have to do that in order to connect with younger people. You need to be yourself and you need to present value to your audience.

Violeta Yas:

So, I think making sure that you have an understanding of those platforms and are using them to your advantage, because they weren't always a tool in the toolbox. In my case, it was just the beginning. But also making sure that you are, especially if you are on the market for a job, you want to make sure that the content you're creating and what you're putting out there supports that, because you want people to see what you can do in that capacity.

Kelly Savoie:

Violeta, thank you so much for sharing everything about your career. Before we end the podcast, we always like to ask our guests one last fun question. I'd like to ask you, if you can meet one famous person, alive or dead, who would it be?

Violeta Yas:

I have had the same answer to this question for a million years and it's Michael Jordan. It's Michael Jordan. I love Michael Jordan. I was a huge Bulls fan growing up. I was more so an MJ fan. It's hard to not be a fan of a dynasty like that. But I think just his mentality and his tenacity is just something to marvel at. Very few people in the sports world, there are plenty of amazing athletes every single year, but I always found his story to be just so interesting and how even some of the other greatest of the greatest basketball players and athletes, they all also look at him like he's just different. He's just different, his different mentality. So, just that tenacity and the never say die, and just confident all the time, is something that I always found really interesting. So, I would love to share a meal with Michael Jordan.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. There's definitely not much not to like about Michael Jordan. He's certainly a class act.

Rex Horner:

Well, maybe he will listen to this podcast and reach out to you, Violeta. So, we've been speaking with Violeta Yas, a meteorologist for NBC New York in Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. Thanks so much for joining us, Violeta, and sharing your experiences with us. It's been a true honor.

Violeta Yas:

Thank you so much, guys. It's great to be here with you.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.

Rex Horner:

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is produced by Brandon Crose and edited by Peter Trepke, technical direction is provided by Peter Killelea. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie. And the show is hosted by Rex Horner and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show

online at www.ametsoc.org/clearskies and can contact us at skypodcast@ametsoc.org if you have any feedback or would like to become a future guest.